



Taking nationality hostage

Structural discrimination in Danish immigration and integration discourses

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Taking nationality hostage: Structural discrimination in immigration and integration discourses

This paper examines the influence of structural discrimination in regard to immigration, integration, and policy. While my use of structural discrimination builds on both the international human rights framework, as well as academic research and development of this term (Pincus 1996; Hill 1989; Kamali 2009). Structural discrimination is defined here as discursive and constitutive discrimination expressed implicitly in underlying assumptions and attitudes (Skadegaard Thorsen 2014) and is linked to, but distinct from institutional discrimination. That is, structural discrimination describes discrimination that is not necessarily explicitly inscribed in laws, rules, or in other ways a result of formal processes or legal systems. It can be a result of informal institutions and practices, habit, tradition, and norms, and can have its point of departure in social, institutional, historical, and normative structures, beliefs, and systems (Skadegaard Thorsen 2015). As Masoud Kamali points out, structural discrimination “...legitimizes and normalizes indirect forms of negative treatment of the “Others” and makes it a part of everyday normal life of society (2009, p.6).”

Structural discrimination describes an abstract and hegemonic production and maintenance of beliefs and constructions that underscores the more specific, explicit expressions of discrimination that we see in everyday interactions and expressions (such as media and public discourse and communication). It includes the gray zone in which underlying, non-articulated assumptions congeal (Butler 1990), or sediment (Spivak 1999), into unquestioned assumptions over time. Let me emphasize that structural discrimination is understood here as broader than racism and structural racism. That is, it refers to underlying dynamics of hegemonic and normative production in regard to *all* the discrimination grounds specified within the declaration of human rights and the covenants.

I suggest that structural discrimination enables witting and unwitting complicity and participation in discriminatory patterns, and may contribute to discriminatory speech and challenges in political communication. As research has shown, racism and discrimination are a part of everyday structures and norms (Essed 1991; Bulmer and Solomos 2010; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Andreassen 2005; Bonilla-Silva 2010; Gullestad 2004; Skadegaard Thorsen 2014).

In the paper I argue that Danish immigration and integration discourses connected with public policy are imbricated within (and expressions of) discriminatory discourses. As such, immigration and integration become vessels for every-day, normative discriminatory perspectives to gain or maintain ground and reproduce colonial images of Danishness and racialized others, perpetuating inequality, racial discrimination and racism. Using examples from the June 2015 election debates and campaigns in which

immigration is a central theme, the article examines how such dynamics undermine democratic principles and normalize discrimination and racism.

This Paper will consider how structural discrimination contributes to and exacerbates certain challenges connected with immigration and integration. Examples such as the conflation of integration with assimilation and stratification discussions (such as which national/ethnic groups should be denied immigration and which not) – both of which negatively impact basic human rights democratic principles - will be discussed.

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